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**House of Representatives**

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January 17, 2024

The Honorable Carlos Del Toro  
Secretary of the Navy  
Department of the Navy  
1000 Navy Pentagon  
Washington, D.C. 20350

Dear Secretary Del Toro,

Supreme Allied Commander General Dwight Eisenhower once stated, “You will not find it difficult to prove that battles, campaigns, and even wars have been won or lost primarily because of logistics.” While arming Taiwan remains a central element of strengthening our deterrence-by-denial posture against the prospect of Chinese aggression, the United States must also have a robust logistical network to sustain our personnel, bases, ships, and aircraft with *fuel*, without which our military would grind to a halt. In the western Pacific, the United States faces a “tyranny of distance” – requiring the movement of troops and equipment over thousands of miles in responding to any contingencies. The recent closure of the Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility, a large logistics facility in Hawaii holding critical stores of fuel, has added to this inherent geographical challenge. In the face of the Chinese Communist Party’s historic military buildup, creating a viable, long-term plan to redistribute Red Hill’s fuel is a strategic imperative.

Red Hill, located at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam in Honolulu, Hawaii, served for decades as a vital underground fuel storage facility to support and sustain our forces operating throughout the Pacific.<sup>1</sup> With a capacity to securely store 250 million gallons of fuel, Red Hill was able to significantly cut the distances fuel tankers needed to travel to transport fuel to locations in the Pacific. In March 2022, Secretary Austin announced the closure of the Red Hill facility due to fuel leaks that were contaminating the drinking water on the island of Oahu. Since then, the Department of Defense (DoD) and the Navy have repeatedly downplayed the impact the closure would have on our operational posture in the Indo-Pacific. Questions remain, however, about whether the DoD maintains a clear plan for bulk fuel storage in the region moving forward, namely the redistribution of fuel from Red Hill.

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<sup>1</sup> Commander, Navy Region Hawaii, *The Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility*, United States Navy (Oct. 2, 2023) available at <https://cnrh.cnic.navy.mil/Operations-and-Management/Red-Hill/Department-of-Defense-Closure-Plan-Red-Hill-Bulk-Fuel-Storage-Facility/>.

In announcing the closure of Red Hill last year, the DoD explained that it would reposition fuel stored at Red Hill to both land and afloat locations, in part, “by leveraging commercial infrastructure.”<sup>2</sup> Secretary Austin stated, “To a large degree, we already avail ourselves of dispersed fueling at sea and ashore, permanent and rotational. We will now expand and accelerate that strategic distribution.”<sup>3</sup>

Yet it is unclear how exactly the Navy will replace and distribute the aggregate bulk fuel capacity of Red Hill. Smaller storage capacity at new locations will likely require more frequent trips by our fleet of fuel tankers between the continental United States and locations dispersed throughout the Pacific, thereby adding to operational risk and uncertainty. Using tankers as afloat storage points for prolonged periods of time may create the potential for the degradation of militarily useful fuels (through oxidation). Thus, while the Pentagon has publicly stated that it “has taken actions to reposition fuel within the theater,” it is unclear whether any such actions are adequate to support contingency operations and present long-term solutions for bulk fuel availability for force mobility and power projection in the region.<sup>4</sup>

Exacerbating the situation is the inadequacy of our current and anticipated future fleet of replenishment oilers and tankers to transport fuel across the vast Pacific. In 2016, U.S. Transportation Command identified a requirement for 86 fuel tanker ships for moving equipment and supplies in support of global operations.<sup>5</sup> Our current fleet of fuel tankers does not come close to meeting this requirement. The Navy’s current fleet consists of 16 fleet replenishment oilers, five tankers, and two fast combat support ships, all of which can carry fuel.<sup>6</sup> Recently, nine ships were added to a DoD program known as the Tanker Security Program to supplement the fleet of Naval tankers and oilers.<sup>7</sup> Even with the Tanker Security Program, the Navy appears to be short – by several dozen – ships that will be needed to transport and deliver fuel to our bases and forces operating across the Indo-Pacific.

While logistical issues – certainly one as mundane as fuel storage and delivery – do not receive the level of public attention that many other defense matters do, they will be critical to our

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<sup>2</sup> Terri Moon Cronk, *Defense Secretary Calls for Hawaii Facility to be Shut Down*, DOD News (Mar. 7, 2022) available at <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/2958311/defense-secretary-calls-for-hawaii-facility-to-be-shut-down/>; Department of Defense, *Fact Sheet* (Mar. 7, 2022) available at <https://media.defense.gov/2022/Mar/07/2002951788/-1/-1/0/Red-Hill-Fact-Sheet-FinalV2.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Secretary Lloyd Austin, *Statement on the Closure of the Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility*, Department of Defense (Mar. 7, 2022) available at <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/2957825/statement-by-secretary-of-defense-lloyd-j-austin-iii-on-the-closure-of-the-red/>.

<sup>4</sup> Brigadier General Pat Ryder, Transcript of Press Briefing, Department of Defense (Sept. 12, 2023) available at <https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/3523824/pentagon-press-secretary-brigadier-general-pat-ryder-and-deputy-assistant-secre/>.

<sup>5</sup> Lieutenant General Stephen Lyons, U.S. Army, Deputy Commander of USTRANSCOM, “Logistics and Sealift Forces,” statement before House Armed Services Committee Subcommittee on Seapower and Projection Forces, March 22, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Navy Military Sealift Command, *MSC Ship Poster*, available at [https://www.msc.usff.navy.mil/Portals/43/Posters/MSC\\_USNavyShips-2023.pdf?ver=2iT99A7IWorRqRjPu3ve2w%3d%3d](https://www.msc.usff.navy.mil/Portals/43/Posters/MSC_USNavyShips-2023.pdf?ver=2iT99A7IWorRqRjPu3ve2w%3d%3d).

<sup>7</sup> Caitlin M. Kenney, *Tanker program adds 9 ships to fuel US military in a crisis*, Defense One (July 27, 2023) available at <https://www.defenseone.com/policy/2023/07/tanker-program-adds-9-ships-fuel-us-military-crisis/388924/>.

ability to respond to and prevail in any conflict. Fixing logistical issues will not guarantee victory, but leaving them unaddressed—or with short-term patches—will only make failure more likely. We must address potential weaknesses in our logistical supply lines, while we still have the time to do so.

To better understand and to strengthen our ability to work jointly to address the challenges arising from the closure of Red Hill, we respectfully request that you provide written responses to the following questions no later than February 7, 2024:

1. What plans do you have to build new hardened underground fuel storage facilities in the Indo-Pacific theater?
  - a. Have you identified secure locations where you could build such replacement facilities? If so, where? What support do you need from Congress to carry out new constructions?
  - b. If you do not have plans to build any such new facilities, please explain how existing facilities will sufficiently replace Red Hill, in terms of fuel storage capacity and facility protection.
2. Do we currently have enough secure forward fuel storage facilities and access to refinery capacity to support operations in the Indo-Pacific?
3. Do you plan to integrate facilities of allies and partners in redistributing fuel from Red Hill? Please explain what assurances are being sought or are currently in place.
4. What are your plans to integrate commercially owned and operated fuel storage facilities with military use?
5. Is the current number of fuel tankers in the Navy sufficient to support contingency attrition in the Pacific? What is the targeted number of in-theater tankers desired in peacetime and in wartime?
6. Does your plan to redistribute fuel from Red Hill include using afloat tankers? If so, please explain how this plan takes into account potential degradation of refined fuel over time, including diesel, gasoline, and, most importantly, jet fuel (to include JP-5 for ship use).
7. Do you plan to expand the number of ships participating in the Tanker Security Program? If so, do you think such a plan will be sufficient to meet the requirement for 86 fuel tanker ships, as identified by the U.S. Transportation Command in 2016?

The House Select Committee on the Strategic Competition Between the United States and the Chinese Communist Party has broad authority to “investigate and submit policy recommendations on the status of the Chinese Communist Party’s economic, technological, and security progress and its competition with the United States” under H. Res. 11.

To make arrangements to deliver a response, please contact Select Committee staff at (202) 226-9678.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter and prompt reply.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'AG', followed by a horizontal line.

Mike Gallagher  
Chairman

Cc:

John Wade, Vice Admiral, Commander, Red Hill Joint Task Force

Michelle Skubic, Vice Admiral, Director, Defense Logistics Agency

Jacqueline Van Ovost, General, Commander, United States Transportation Command